

## Cheering crowd greets ex-prisoner

Freed after 27 years, hero gets a raucous airport welcome

By FRANK BURGOS

Chanting "Viva Roberto," a wildly enthusiastic crowd of more than 500 greeted Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez, Cuba's longest serving political prisoner, at Miami International Airport Saturday evening.

After spending 27 years in prison, Perez Rodriguez was freed Friday after a request for his release from the chief of Panama's defense forces, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega. An impassioned letter from Perez Rodriguez's 84-year-old mother, who lives in Miami, convinced Noriega to help.

Perez Rodriguez arrived on a 5:30 p.m. flight from Panama, where he had been taken after his release from the Combinado del Este prison in Cuba. As soon as he passed Customs, he was met by a phalanx of reporters, cameras and well-wishers. His white guayabera was soon stained with pink lipstick from the kisses of relatives and friends, and he was clearly overwhelmed by the welcome, which almost approached riot conditions.

At first the crowd reluctantly cooperated with airport officials and moved behind purple barriers which separated the Customs exit from the rest of the airport terminal. "Until

everybody moves back, he's not coming out," warned Metro-Dade terminal operations specialist Jesus Hernandez.

But once Perez Rodriguez appeared, decorum was pushed aside by joyful emotion.

Metro-Dade police tried in vain to move the crowd back, as people jostled to get closer to the freed prisoner. Almost all tried to touch him, rubbing his bald head in unrepressed affection. For the entire time he was at the airport, someone was hugging or holding him.

"Nobody can be bigger than he is at the

Please turn to PRISONER/8B



MARICE COHN BAND / Miami Herald Staff  
Freed prisoner Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez, left, arrived to a tumultuous welcome.



Charles Whited

## Broke ex-wife relies on friends for food, shelter

*Sidelights of a City:*  
"I have my back against the wall with no place to turn."

The fancy life she knew, with the house at Bay Point, the cook, the governess, the new Caddy every year, the Surf Club cabana, are gone now.

Barbara's broke.

She lives by the charity of women friends, sleeping on their couches, a few days here and a few days there. Her youngest daughter, 16, is out in the city somewhere, a high school dropout working in a sandwich shop. "I don't know where she is staying. With some of her friends. I don't know." Clearly, she doesn't like to think about it.

Though still an attractive blond at 44, Barbara lives with one purpose in mind now: to make her wealthy ex-husband pay what the courts have ruled that he owes her, which is \$1,200 a month

## Young kids learn Spanish by immersion

Broward's approach / 5B

By CATHY SHAW

Herald Staff Writer

For adventures in Spanish, try the third- and fourth-graders at Sabal Palm Elementary School.

"My next-door neighbor is Spanish, and I can talk to him," said Timothy Eising, 9.

"I'm teaching my mother," said Melissa Zelniker, 9.

"Well, we went to the flea market to buy a present for my friend and the guy was selling shoes and he only spoke Spanish," said Marisa Chapkanov, 8. "So I had to tell him Size 7 in Spanish, so we got the right size."

Sabal Palm's Principal Gertrude Edelman says she got the right program at the right time: Spanish immersion for kindergarten students, beginning five years ago. Now, those same students are in fourth grade, and they speak Spanish.



BRIAN SMITH / Miami Herald Staff

AT HOME ON THE BEACH Jose Hernandez sits in the lobby of apartment house

# Area becomes a waiting room for the poor

BEACH / from 1B

Hispanics moving to South Beach, sees it differently. "It's not discrimination on either side," said Coto, 81. "They have their culture, which is different than ours. They have their social groups, and we have ours."

Young families, once the exception, have brought new life to neighborhoods.

"I was driving down there the other day," said Don Flachmeier, director of community services for Lutheran Ministries. "On the same streets that five years ago used to be filled with elderly, people with walkers moving slowly, I saw kids on Big Wheels."

The signs of change are everywhere:

- South Beach Elementary closed eight years ago because of low enrollment, is expected to reopen in 1989 to relieve overcrowding at Fisher and Fienberg elementary schools.

- A new class of retirees, Latins from across Dade and across the country, is calling South Beach home. They move here for the same reasons that drew another group of immigrants decades ago — to retire in the sunshine among their own kind.

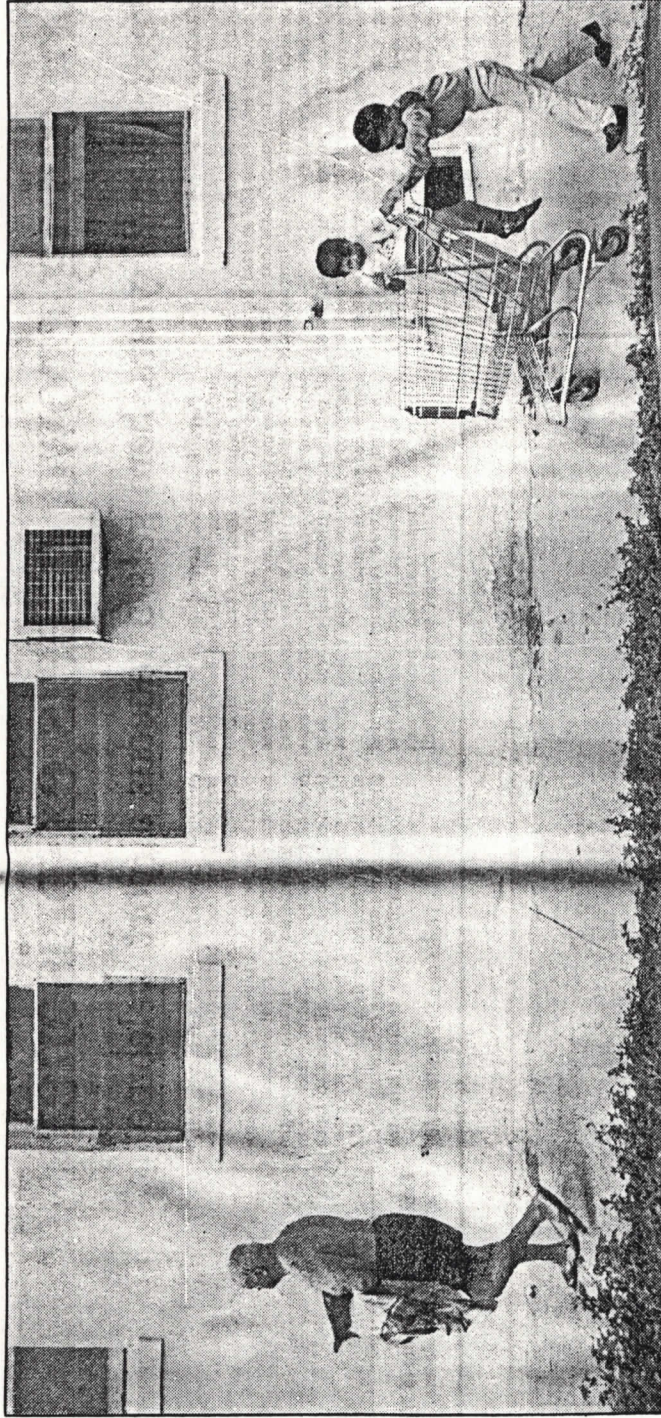
Elderly Hispanics now make up 60 percent of residents who get federal rent subsidies on South Beach. The Little Havana Activities Center opened a branch on South Beach 2½ years ago to provide recreation and Cuban food. It serves 180 people a day, turning away many.

- The Jewish Community Center/Senior Center started offering a Spanish class for its members two years ago. The center added a second class this year. Director Yvonne Lee is planning programs to draw elderly Latins as well as elderly Jews.

- The Stanley Myers Community Health Center, established as a geriatric center nine years ago, now dispenses medicine for head, lice and diaper rash. Just last year, the center began offering AIDS testing. Ninety-two percent of its clients are in their 20s and 30s. Most are Latin.

Nine years ago, when the Stanley Myers center opened, 98 percent of the clients were elderly and Jewish. Thousands were retired Jewish garment workers from New York, Eastern European immigrants who fled first Hitler and later the northern winters.

"My recentist cousin came



BRIAN SMITH / Miami Herald Staff

South Beach has become a mix of young refugees and elderly retirees. As an elderly man passes, Frank Virella, 6, pushes his brother Herardo, 4, along Second Street.

## She survives, but little else does

By GELAREH ASAYESH  
Herald Staff Writer

Almost a century of living has shorn Bertha Wurtzel of expectation. At 91, she is grateful for the small things.

She has a nice apartment on South Beach, a good social worker and \$82 a week to live on. Her son visits each year.

Once, Wurtzel was one of many, part of a wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who settled on South Beach and made it theirs. Today, she is one of a few, a solitary survivor of bygone days.

When Wurtzel steps out on her little balcony, the alleyway below is filled with laughter, children crying and Spanish voices. Everywhere are signs of a different South Beach.

"I don't speak the language my neighbors speak," says Wurtzel. "But I keep myself busy. In the mornings I straighten up. And in the afternoons I watch my stories on TV."

snatch three years ago, had only a few dollars in her pocketbook.

She was born in New York City, the Jewish daughter of a Polish-Austrian couple. Her husband was a garment worker from New York's Lower East Side. She moved to South Beach in 1960.

Now and then, there are memories of a time when there was more to life.

She had a neighbor, Joseph Siegel. When she fell and broke her wrist, he stopped for her and kept her company.

"He went to the veterans nursing home," said Wurtzel. "When he didn't feel good, at first I went to see him. He didn't recognize me."

"We used to go dancing at Sixth Street," she says, her face losing its serenity. "I hope he's still alive. I want to feel that he's still alive, but I know he's not."

She's already made her application to a



BRIAN SMITH / Miami Herald Staff

straightens up, in the afternoon she watches television.

# 7 years, 4 kids later, regrets weigh heavily

By ANDRES VIGLUCCI  
Herald Staff Writer

Fresh off the Mariel boat lift, Susana Alvarez came to South Beach seven years ago and, to her regret, never left.

Those seven years have brought her four children.

The father of the first two went to New Jersey. The father of the third turned to drugs. The father of the fourth died in an epileptic seizure.

Now Alvarez, 25, is expecting her fifth child. The father, a house painter, visits every day after work, buys food for her kids and promises to support his child. She is unemployed.

"Ay Dios mío, what a story," Alvarez says when she's done telling it. Chagrin shows through her smile.

Takes such as hers are common among the new denizens of South Beach. Mostly Hispanic, they in-

clude working families and impoverished refugees, store owners struggling alongside single women raising children on welfare.

Alvarez and her children get \$560 a month in government support and share a \$250-a-month, one-room apartment on Pennsylvania Avenue.

She has had to quit several jobs, mostly in hotels, because she had nowhere to leave her children.

She dislikes South Beach — the muggings, the dope dealing — but feels trapped.

"It's hard for a woman like me — alone, with no money, with four kids and expecting another — to just pick up and go somewhere else," she says.

Still, she says: "I feel good about my family. I don't regret having my kids. The only clean thing, the only good thing one has in life, are one's children."

won city approval to offer job training, dropout prevention programs and recreation for the elderly.

The Miami Beach Homeowners Association sued to stop the project, complaining the center was an improper use of city land and would draw poor people to South Beach. The suit was dismissed last month. The center, at Second Street and Washington Avenue, will open in June.

The suit is an example of the difficulties social workers have encountered in coping with the realities of the new South Beach.

"It's as though we were coming into this wonderful tourist mecca and bringing with us all these undesirables," said Marti Walsh, director of Lutheran Ministries.

"That's just not the reality of Second and Washington in 1987," she said. "If we were to go away tomorrow, the problems wouldn't."

# Crime rate holds steady, but crack creates new problems

By CHRISTOPHER WELLISZ  
Herald Staff Writer

Bernardo Praschnik kicked a pint bottle of liquor from the sidewalk in front of his Washington Avenue drugstore and scowled.

"You see here," Praschnik said. "That's all you get in the street. Drunks." Even as Miami Beach police moved into a gleaming new headquarters on Washington Avenue this spring, merchants along the commercial street were as worried as ever about crime.

They are familiar with the pickpockets who prey on the elderly waiting at bus

stops. They complain about derelicts congregating on corners. Many say they have been burglarized repeatedly in recent months.

Yet, police see reasons for optimism. But crime remains high in South Beach, but crime is rising all over Dade. The situation isn't as bad as it might be, considering the growth in the population and decline in the average age.

In 1982, Miami Beach south of Boulevard, with about half the city's population, accounted for 58 percent of the reported crimes. The proportion has remained steady in the years since.

statistics show. Citywide, the number of reported crimes rose 18 percent — from 11,540 in 1983 to 13,655 last year.

Crimes surged after the city was jolted by the influx of poor refugees during the 1980 Mariel boat lift, police say. Many refugees settled in crumbling, low-rent housing in South Beach. Since then, however, the crime rate has been relatively steady, the streets less violent.

Homicides declined, dropping from 23 in 1982 to 16 last year. About two-thirds of the homicides have been in South Beach. Police say the types of killings are changing. Victims are now more likely to

be drug dealers than law-abiding citizens.

"Five years ago, there were people who would kill you for no reason," said Lt. Francis Conwell. "Today, they might beat you up and take your cocaine, but there aren't the same sort of mad dogs."

At the same time, Beach police are swamped by the crack epidemic that has swept urban areas across the country.

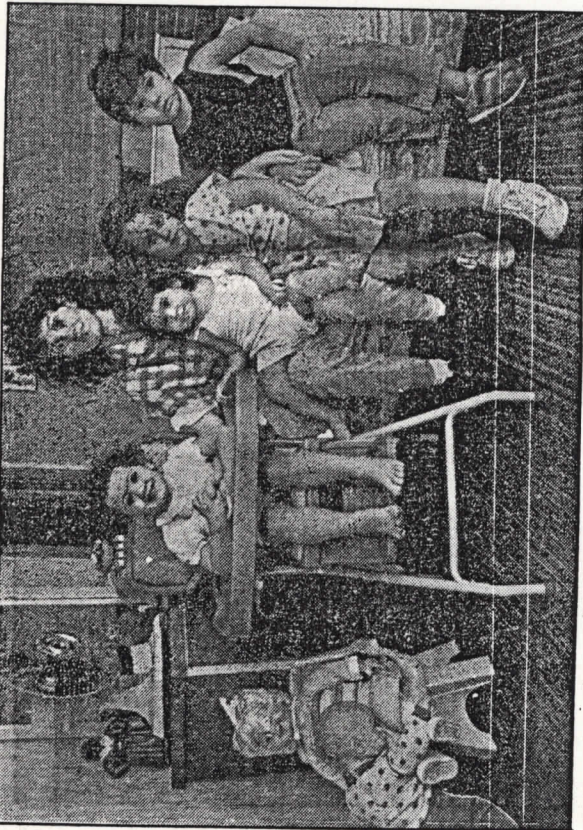
"When crack cocaine arrived, it had a ready market in South Beach, and it just took off," Conwell said.

"Today we got about 50 narcotics complaints," Conwell said. "We're serving a warrant on a home where that's

minute. We have a SWAT team mobilized. We're negotiating to do some buys and sales of large amounts of marijuana. It's just another day in Fort Apache."

In the past year, police have been making about 50 drug-related arrests per week. "There isn't a dealer on the street who hasn't been arrested two or three times," Conwell said.

Drug raids didn't solve the problem, police found. So they started a "hot spot" program to identify buildings that were centers of criminal activity. Nineteen such buildings have been closed in the past 18 months.



Susana Alvarez in her Miami Beach apartment with her children Jacklin, 2, Angela, 16 months, Yamilet and Carlos, 4.

soared, and low rents drew an underclass to South Beach — criminals, drug users, impoverished refugees.

By the time the 1980 census was taken, South Beach was already home to 12,000 Hispanics, who made up 26 percent of the population.

"It was a combination of the Mariel boat lift and the moratorium," said Lee, director of the Jewish Community Center/Senior Center. "That combination is what's changed the Beach."

Over the years, a population high in young and single men expanded to include families — first just parents and children, later grandmothers and grandfathers, too.

With the death and displacement of elderly residents, South Beach is at a turning point. While longtime residents speculate about another Little Havana, city officials are working on something more affluent. "Our target is to find another

group to fill that vacuum," said Assistant City Manager Richard Fosmoen.

But so far, the young professionals who could revive Miami Beach's tax base make up less than 10 percent of the population south of Lincoln Road, according to United Way estimates.

Meanwhile, needs outstrip resources on South Beach.

"There are many gaps," said Ed Gehret, director of Dade County's Fisher-Fienberg Adult Education Center on South Beach. "There are many people that are living in substandard human conditions because of it. And uprooting Miami Beach in the next few years isn't going to make it go away."

At Stanley Myers Health Center, Press signs up 400 new patients a month. They come from all over Central America, but include growing populations of Haitians and Nicaraguans.

Zoila Salgado, 36, came from Honduras. She lived in Allapattah,

then moved to South Beach one year ago with her Cuban-born husband, Roberto Salgado. They live with their three children in a \$350-a-month, one-bedroom apartment on Washington Avenue and Salgado's Market on the corner of Fifth Street and Collins Avenue.

"I like the atmosphere here better," Zoila Salgado said in Spanish, as she worked the cash register with her 5-year-old daughter Jessica by her side. "We have the beach nearby, there are a lot of people who walk to the stores, and they speak my language."

Others are not so satisfied. Like the elderly, many of the young complain of crime, drugs and deteriorating neighborhoods.

"If I'm on my way to the grocery store with my girl, they'll say, 'Want some rock?'" said Susana Alvarez, 25, a single mother of four children. "All the people here are trash. They don't

respect nobody on South Beach." Alvarez wants to leave South Beach, but she said she has nowhere to go. South Beach is like a waiting room where the young and able linger until life offers something better.

"They get out of here as fast as they can," said Tom Chaille, a general practitioner at the center. "They come here because there's a Hispanic community, but as soon as they get on their feet, they're going to move somewhere else where they can raise a family."

The lack of services such as affordable day care makes it harder for young families on South Beach to move up. At least five agencies have been looking for space to open day care services for the indigent. As yet, they haven't been able to find space.

Last year, Lutheran Ministries and two other social services agencies joined to establish a family center at a city-owned facility in Friendship Park. They

won city approval to offer job training, dropout prevention programs and recreation for the elderly.

The Miami Beach Homeowners Association sued to stop the project, complaining the center was an improper use of city land and would draw poor people to South Beach. The suit was dismissed last month. The center, at Second Street and Washington Avenue, will open in June.

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